where the bridge leads. Craven, guard the scientists. When T'serek returns either take everyone to the far side, or wait for me here. If I do not return within twenty minutes, Dr. Palevi will be in command."

"Then something is following us," said Clement, swallowing.

"Supposition is pointless when empirical evidence becomes available, Mr. Clement. I intend to find out."

Dray had already stepped out on the bridge, but he stopped when Spock gave his order. Nadia thought for a moment that he was going to protest or demand to go with Spock, but the Vulcan didn't wait to hear it, and after a moment T'serek turned. His body shielded the light, and after a few moments all they could see was a dim glow. Spock took no light, and Craven doused the one he held. The dark settled down like a physical weight on their shoulders.

T'serek returned, after what seemed hours, but was less than ten minutes. He reported that the span was slippery, but solid enough. It was steeper on the far side, and would require care to descend. He sent them across, Hillis first, then the Speaker, Clement and the two women. At his nod Craven stepped up on the bridge after Nadia, careful not to crowd her. T'serek cut his torch then and effectively cut off her protest. For once the dark was an asset, hiding the drop beneath them. They crossed the gap, slower than T'serek had, and dropped down on the other side.

"Look, Nadia--steps," Sunderson was the first to spot them, "and walls, like a little town." Hillis played his torch around, and Nadia saw the similarity for herself, square open boxes with foot thick walls between them, dropping down below them, like some roofless hillside town. "Uh, could we find a sandbox somewhere?"

Nadia told herself it was pointless to be afraid of the dark where there was no light at all. Beth was right. There hadn't been a bush since breakfast.

"We won't go far," she told Hillis. "You keep the light so we can see you."

"The things they don't tell you in training," Beth said as they stumbled into the shadows. "I don't know whether I'm too scared to go or if I have permanent bladder damage from holding it so long I was beginning to wish I was an android."

"Next time around," Nadia answered, and then regretted the despair she heard in her own voice.

"Are we going to die?" And when Nadia didn't answer, "I'm sorry I'm not braver, Nadia, but I'm like Clement. I know how to work in a lab. I thought it would be like that and we'd go shopping and buy some souvenirs and come home. I'm not any good at this."

"Oh, Beth. We haven't given up yet. Spock is very good at his job; the security men are the best the Captain could send; and at least Clement cares for you."

"I don't want him to." It was low-voiced confession. "I want--wanted Dray to notice me--and he doesn't know I'm alive."

Oh, Mother, thought Nadia. Why isn't anything, ever simple.

Nadia took charge of the light while the men went off to relieve themselves, and the party had regathered when the mist over the gulf began to glow. For a moment the light dazzled Nadia's eyes and she saw a four-armed figure full of shadowy menace. She blinked, and it was only Dray and Spock, but before she had mastered the rush of adrenalin through her system the dark exploded into red and white brilliance and rain of rock and gravel. Spock was first on the bridge. The light blinded him, and the barage of debris spun him sideways, almost over the edge. T'serek dropped his light but got his hands on Spock, fighting to keep his own balance. In a moment they had recovered.

"I am all right, Mr. T'serek. We can go on."

If T'serek had expected a more gracious thanks, his face didn't show it. "I can't see, sir. You'll have to guide me off the bridge." The Vulcan's inner eyelid had saved his sight before when a human would have been blinded. He took T'serek's hand, and the Guthrie followed as confidently as if he'd been sighted.

"The effect will fade ," Spock predicted. He left T'serek and lifted Nadia to her feet. Her torch, luckily, was unbroken. Sunderson had struggled up and turned a dazed face toward the source of the explosion.

"The men," said Nadia. "They went down there."

Several of the small rooms were a shambles. There was no sign of the men at all until the torch caught something crimson blooming among the rocks. Sunderson turned away and vomited. T'serek eyes were watering profusly and he tried to rub the blindness away, see what they were seeing.

"Hillis?" he said uncertainly.

"I hear breathing," Spock said. He pointed to a slab of stone tilted up toward the still standing angle of a wall. T'serek turned his head, following the gesture blurrily. Spock took the light from Nadia's hand and went belly down beside the crevice, T'serek following.

"I can't see them," the boy said.

"They may be unconscious.. Please take the light again, Doctor, and hold it thus--" He placed her in front of the spill and stood, measuring the size of the slab. "When I lift, Mr. T'serek, you will pull them out." Spock bent to the slab and lifted. There was a complaint of masonry and rattle of falling gravel as T'serek slid swiftly into the opening. They heard the confused sounds of bodies being pushed or shoved across the rubble, and then Nadia and Beth were helping, pulling on dust covered limbs.

"Quickly!"

T'serek rolled clear, the Speaker's form clasped in his arms. There was a soft crash of stone. Spock had not lost his grip on the slab, but the supporting angle at the rear had collapsed. He let the stone drop and took the torch from her.

"Do what you can for them," he said.

Clement was wiping blood out of his eyes, and Nadia knelt at his side.

"It's Nadia, Clement. Let me see what you've done to yourself. Ah, that hurts? I'll be more careful." She wiped an ugly laceration on his forehead gently, and tried to test his pupils in the moving light of the torch. They were slightly uneven, but they both contracted. "What else hurts?"